

By N. Susan Emeagwali

# NPS Draws CTE Educators from Around the Country

**NPS PROVIDED CTE PROFESSIONALS WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO KEEP ABREAST OF DEVELOPMENTS ON CAPITOL HILL WITH PRESENTATIONS FROM KEYNOTE PRESENTERS SUCH AS OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL AND ADULT EDUCATION CHIEF BRENDA DANN-MESSIER, AND THE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION'S JANE OATES.**

**CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATORS DESCENDED ON ARLINGTON,** Virginia, for the Association for Career and Technical Education's (ACTE) National Policy Seminar (NPS), March 8–10. The event provided career and technical education (CTE) professionals with an opportunity to keep abreast of developments on Capitol Hill with presentations from keynote presenters Brenda Dann-Messier, assistant secretary, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), and Jane Oates, assistant secretary, Employment and Training Administration. Other presenters included congressional staffers and representatives from organizations such as the National Governors Association (NGA), U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium (NASDCTEC), American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), and the National Education Association.

Jan Bray, ACTE's executive director, kicked off NPS by noting that CTE and the success of the American economy are inextricably linked.

"Everyone is looking to CTE to solve the problems of our country—Are we ready to respond?"

Bray said CTE needs to embrace a mindset of transformation. Part of this transformational thinking, she said, will be a greater focus on data and research to highlight the value of CTE by showing its outcomes. In addition, ACTE members need to continue providing anecdotal information to their legislators and communities about how CTE is making a significant contribution by providing stu-

dents with real-world, hands-on learning that keeps them engaged in school; giving students opportunities to acquire technical skills and to explore careers; and fostering the learning of academics. CTE is also crucial in giving adults the skills and training they need to meet the demands of an ever-changing workforce, she added.

Bray said there is strength in numbers and the Association's membership needs to be increased to bolster its power. To that end she urged members to encourage their colleagues who are not members to join. With a larger membership, she said, ACTE will have an even bigger say in policymaking on Capitol Hill.

## **OVAE's Brenda Dann-Messier: CTE's Role in the Knowledge-based Economy**

Today's jobseekers face realities such as globalization and technological advances that will impact their career prospects, said Brenda Dann-Messier. Giving the keynote address on March 10, Dann-Messier noted that employers want employees who have the right skills to succeed in what is a global economy. These include technical skills and the ability to problem solve, communicate effectively and to innovate.

Equally important are academic credentials; many of the fastest growing fields will require workers with a bachelor's degree, and the United States is falling behind its international counterparts in the number of graduates with this credential, she noted. The problem is particularly prevalent in minority populations where even fewer graduate from college. The good news is, though, that CTE is

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integral in reversing that trend because it positively affects student outcomes. Dann-Messier said more CTE students are going on to postsecondary education than ever before; in addition, CTE is providing students with technical skills that employers want—skills for jobs that can't be shipped overseas. The key, Dann-Messier said, is to ensure that CTE programs are rigorous and relevant across the board; utilize research to determine best practices; and are accountable through the use of data systems.

OVAE is undertaking a number of initiatives to improve worker skills and to provide job training opportunities. Among them is the funding of a technical assessment academy through the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education; helping states—such as Ohio and New Jersey—take their green programs to scale; improving rural schools and communities by the implementation of career clusters and STEM programming; working with other agencies such as the Labor Department to develop best practice initiatives and job training opportunities in expanding areas such as energy; and investing a proposed \$12 billion in community colleges through the American Graduation Initiative to



▲ NPS convened hundreds of CTE educators in Arlington, Virginia, March 8-10, where they were privy to presentations and workshops on the latest developments in CTE.



▲ ACTE President Ed Melott introduces Brenda Dann-Messier, assistant secretary, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, for the keynote address on March 10.

## The Administration's Plan

Roberto Rodriguez, special assistant to the president for education, Domestic Policy Council, The White House, gave the keynote address during the Opening General Session on March 8. He outlined the Administration's initiatives. They include:

- The American Graduation Initiative, which focuses on cradle-to-career education for students; it will be jointly facilitated by the White House, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor. Community colleges will benefit from a proposed
- \$12 billion for higher education.
- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is a "key domestic priority" for President Obama. The president has noted that the achievement gap between wealthy and economically vulnerable communities is harming American competition, and this can only be helped by a commitment to CTE, Rodriguez said.
- A commitment to "educate our way to a stronger economy." Rodriguez cited the \$70 billion allocated to education in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.
- The Race to the Top competition and its intent to make education "more fair and equitable," and the potential of the Graduation Promise Fund, included in the SAFRA bill, which invests in secondary education to prevent dropout.
- Current and future initiatives to accelerate success in educational reform by changing policies and practices at state and local levels—especially in advancing teacher development through relevant training within preparatory and support programs. **I**



prepare workers in the fastest growing fields—such as green and information technology.

Dann-Messier said CTE has a window of opportunity to really make a difference. “We have a once in a lifetime chance to create real change; but it will not occur without commitment.”

### Jane Oates: Making Linkages that Work

One of the challenges facing the CTE field is to ensure that programming is

linked to the needs of employers, said Jane Oates, who provided the keynote address at NPS on March 9. The local one-stops should be depended upon to provide vital labor market information—such as how many employees are needed in particular fields—so that programming can be geared to address those needs. Oates noted that welding programs have been left behind by CTE, because of funding cuts, leaving a void in many areas that is being filled by imported workers.

One employer in New Jersey relocated to Pennsylvania because he couldn’t find the 150 welders he needed for his business locally, she said. In the Gulf Coast, employers brought in welders from Eastern Europe to fill the need for welders. This disconnect, Oates said, can be addressed with the use of labor market information in directing funding to CTE programming that can net graduates jobs locally.

“Small and medium-sized companies are the future of our local economies,” Oates said.

### Panel Looks at the Future of CTE

A number of organizations are working to improve education outcomes, and CTE is playing a role in their efforts. The NGA is actively engaged in a push for the implementation of common core state standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative), said David Wakelyn, program director, Education Division, NGA Center for Best Practices. Wakelyn, on the Closing General Session panel on March 10, noted that the standards would help states accelerate education reform toward the ultimate goal of more students graduating from high school ready for college and work. He noted that the standards would also be invaluable for Programs of Study because it would promote course assessments over units rather than end-of-course exams; the former being more helpful in providing educators with the information they need to improve instruction.

Betsy Brand, executive director, AYPF,

noted that her organization has been focusing on what the research and innovative programming say about student success. The big goals for students are: earning wages that can support a family; being civically engaged; and readiness for lifelong learning. Brand said students meet these goals through academic rigor, employability skills, technological skills and personal motivation. Best practice CTE is providing students with these skills through programming that is academically rigorous; integrated and applied science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) learning; engagement in learning; leadership development; the acquisition of skills wanted by employers; and accelerated learning opportunities via programs such as tech prep.

NASDCTE’s executive director, Kim Green, said its priorities include the development of good data—comparable from state to state. Green said the collection and use of this data is vital in decision making about program improvements and which programs stay or are removed. Green said CTE also needs to move on to common standards that demonstrate the embedded academics in CTE that are acceptable from state to state. Those standards need to be nationally portable, Green emphasized.

“We can’t have 50 standards for 50 states,” she said.

New York City provides an example of the fate of programs that are not exemplary. Gregg Bethel, executive director, Postsecondary Pathways and Planning, NYC Department of Education, told attendees that many CTE programs will be shut down in the city this year because they weren’t serving students’ needs. Students weren’t being graduated and the outcomes were poor, he noted, forcing the mayor and school chancellor to make the difficult decision. The city will now be looking at best practices to implement to help students meet the desired outcomes, Bethel said. ■

## Principles for Learning Unveiled

A Coalition of seven education foundations has developed a framework to promote rigorous and relevant education that will transform K-12 education for the 21st century. The Principles for Learning will be used to inform policymakers as they work to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, said Consortium for School Networking CEO Keith Krueger. During a panel discussion on March 9 he noted that the six principles are:

- Being Literate is at the Core of Learning Any Subject.
- Learning is a Social Act.
- Learning About Learning Establishes A Habit of Inquiry Important in Lifelong Learning.
- Assessing Progress is Part of Learning.
- Learning Includes Turning Information into Knowledge Using Multiple Media.
- Learning Occurs in a Global Context.

The seven organizations are: ACTE; Consortium for School Networking; National Council for the Social Studies; National Council of Teachers of English; National Council of Teachers of Mathematics; National Middle School Association; and National Science Teachers Association. ■